

Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE)

Strategic Plan 2019-2023

Revised August 2017

Mission Statement:

To expand access and increase success in postsecondary education for Arizonans.

Agency Description:

The Commission comprises 16 Commissioners, fourteen of whom are Governor appointed. Commissioners represent both public and private postsecondary education and its constituencies. Core responsibilities of the ACPE are related to student financial assistance programs including administration of state grants, scholarships, forgivable loans, and the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program.

In addition, A.R.S. Title 15, Chapter 14, Article 5, § 15-1851 B1a charges the Commission to focus on the postsecondary needs of the unserved and underserved in Arizona. It is this call to equity that caused the Commission to develop, implement, and build the College and Career Goal Arizona programs, which are designed to support Arizona's middle and high schools. Additionally, these programs assist low-income students and their families plan, transition, and succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Moreover, the Commission has spawned interest and participation from all sectors of postsecondary education to join together to find sustainable solutions to erase the well-documented education and career achievement gap for low-income students and their families. This persistent gap is seen in the educational performance of low-income and minority students in comparison to other groups. This educational gap drives the limited participation in workforce success, as well. The elimination of this gap will propel Arizona forward with the engine of an ever-growing K-12 student talent pool ready to take on the projected 68% of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential or degree in the next decade.

Strategic Issue 1: Student financial assistance dollars have been reduced and the scarcity of funding is impeding access and completion of postsecondary education for Arizonans.

Arizona's postsecondary students have been highly impacted over the past 7 years by a reduction in state student aid and the loss of all federal student aid. Unfortunately, the Private Postsecondary Education Student Assistance Program has been on suspension since FY 2011. The Early Graduation Scholarship Grant was repealed in the 51st Special Legislative Session. The denial of Arizona's College Access Challenge Grant Maintenance of Effort Waiver request by the U.S. DOE and the prior termination of federal LEAP and Special LEAP funding, along with no funding for the newly amended Private Postsecondary Education Grant, demonstrates the great need for financial aid programs.

As the state's representative to the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, Commission staff recognize many states have experienced reductions, but few lost nearly 70% as experienced in Arizona. In FY 2016, \$2.5M represented flow-through funds dedicated to student grants and scholarships. In contrast, in FY 2008 the student

financial assistance dollars were \$7.5M. All Arizona students miss these financial aid dollars. The Commission staff members are dedicated to making sure each dollar of student aid remaining is available in a timely manner and that existing financial aid programs are well administered.

An important response of the Commission to the meager levels of state and federal student aid has been to heighten efforts to raise the awareness and participation in the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program (AFCSP). This state-sponsored program provides investments where earnings grow tax-deferred and distributions are tax-free when used for qualified college expenses. Moreover, contributions of up to \$4,000 for a married filer are annually deductible from Arizona income tax. The AFCSP provides a great opportunity for families to prepare for college expenses and achieved \$1B in assets under management in March of 2015. The strategies under Goal 1 are designed to address the loss of financial aid for Arizona students.

Goal 1: Maximize student financial assistance available and support efforts to restore and increase student aid.

Strategy 1.1: Provide effective and efficient administration of the Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP).

1. Maintain administration similar to state and federal guidelines to provide consistency for both institutions and students.
2. Survey postsecondary institutions regarding effectiveness of administration.
3. Identify and implement areas for administrative improvement annually.
4. Develop, test, and implement streamlined processes.
5. Prepare and distribute reports on students served by program to policy makers.

Performance Measures:

- Achieve 90% satisfaction with administration of program as evaluated by institutional constituencies.
- Document the number of processes annually reviewed.
- Document the number of process improvements implemented and their benefit to better administration.
- Complete and distribute an annual report to policy leaders informing them about participants and the benefits to the State.

Strategy 1.2: Ensure that the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program, (formerly known as the Arizona Math, Science, Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness program or MSSE) is bringing about equity by attracting quality students into teaching preparation programs and alternative teaching certificate programs who will take on a mission of service in order to repay their loans in one of

four ways: by teaching at a low-income school (60% Free and Reduced Lunch schools), by teaching math, science, or special education, by teaching in a rural school, or in a school located on an Indian Reservation.

1. Increase and improve the promotion of the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program to better meet the State's needs for equity and elimination of the achievement gap for Arizona's low-income and minority children.
2. Seek to increase the appropriated funds for this program by \$500,000 in order to begin to increase the teacher pipeline for math, science, special education subjects for low-income, rural, and schools on tribal lands. Raise the number of pre-service teachers served to 82-90 individuals.
3. Identify ways to recruit and financially support individuals who are seeking teacher certification and who fit the profile of someone motivated to achieve equity and to take steps in the school and the classroom to close the achievement gap for low-income and minority K-12 students.
4. Integrate the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) into the AzGrants website providing a simple application for student aid.
5. Develop a marketing plan and promote to all Arizona, college sophomores, as well as students already enrolled in public and private teacher education programs for maximum exposure of these opportunities to eligible students.
6. Prepare an annual report describing student and institutional participants as well as teacher retention, loan forgiveness, and loan repayments.

Performance Measures:

- ATSL Program represents a cohesive forgivable loan program with achievable and measurable goals, which will increase equity and begin to reduce the attainment gap for low-income and minority Arizona K-12 students.
- Application process is simple for students and integrated into the AzGrants web portal to benefit students' understanding of potential financial aid programs.
- Students apply and receive funds in a timely manner contributing to the success of the program and its goals.
- Adequate numbers of eligible students apply and receive funds.
- An annual report to policy leaders is compiled and distributed including data regarding pre-service student participation, institutions participating, data on teacher service in shortage areas, and teacher retention data.

Strategy 1.3: Ensure the sustainability of the AzGrants secure web portal which supports access to state student grants, scholarships, forgivable loans, and additionally serves as the web portal for the exchange of sensitive data and reports for high schools for both FAFSA Finish Line, College Application Campaign, and College Goal FAFSA Student Progress Reports.

1. Single web portal is maintained which accepts student applications and is programmed to complete the back end administrative processes necessary to award student financial aid.
2. Portal provides high school staff and designated entities secure access to individual Student Progress Reports.
3. Portal provides financial aid professionals from postsecondary institutions across the state secure and user-friendly access for verification and certification of student eligibility for financial aid.
4. Portal allows students to track the progress of their application.
5. Website provides links to financial aid options and resources.
6. Data is collected through website regarding students and institutions to be used for reports and data-rich policy decisions.

Performance Measures:

- Inform decision-makers of the return on investment and the need to financially support the maintenance and hosting expenses necessary to maintain this web portal:
 - Number of grants, scholarships, loans issued annually.
 - To achieve the transfer of sensitive data in a secure manner e.g. individual FAFSA Finish Line reports and Student Progress Reports.
- Website allows the Commission to support high schools with up to the minute data on applications (both college and FAFSA); thereby providing the means to securely transmit reports for high school staff to target needs and aid the student in the completion of an application.
- Gather information from postsecondary institutions regarding their assessment of the portal use and the functions it provides.
- Survey high school personnel campaigns regarding the effectiveness of the web portal for their needs.
- Assessment of enhanced security provided through the portal.
- Determine the value of annual reports to policy leaders describing characteristics of students, the institutions participating, as well as data from students regarding barriers and incentives to persistence to degree.

Strategy 1.4: Provide effective and efficient administration and oversight for the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program (AFCSP).

1. Strategic use of a national-level investment advisor provides program-specific data and analysis grounded in a national perspective is delivered to staff, Oversight Committee members, and Trustees (Commissioners) enabling them to guide the AFCSP and its products to a high level of quality, nationally.
2. Through on-going research and participation in professional development venues, Commission staff apprise Commissioners and Oversight Committee members of SEC, MSRB, federal regulations, and national 529 plan issues and trends
3. Commission staff, Trustees, and Oversight Committee members use knowledge of best practices and successes of other state programs to improve Arizona 529 plan administration and offerings.
4. Processes to ensure the interest of the state and the needs of Arizona residents are being met are in place.
5. Improved processes and procedures are developed, tested, and implemented annually.
6. Staff, with a public relations firm, develop and implement an on-going public awareness/marketing plan to inform and encourage Arizona families to prepare for the expenses of postsecondary education through a tax-advantaged 529 plan.
7. Commission staff provides measures of the success of the 529 plan, using various sources of data and program mission and goals.

Performance Measures:

- Program administration, operating procedures, and offering materials comply with regulatory and College Savings Plan Network standards, reflecting best practices of the industry.
- Director and Executive Director attend national meetings, participate in professional organizations, and bring research and best practices to the trustees, Oversight Committee, and administration of the AFCSP.
- Expert advice is sought from a recognized industry expert for issues of product and trend analysis, evaluation of program manager service, as well as advice on matters of legal and regulatory import.
- Director, with investment advisor, holds monthly meetings with representatives of program managers, reviewing the interests of the state, and ensuring program participant needs are being considered as well as compliance with contract obligations.
- Management reports are prepared and distributed among constituencies.
- Public awareness of 529 plan benefits are increased through public awareness efforts.
- The number of Arizona families benefiting from the AFCSP increases annually by a predetermined annual goal.

- Number of publications (digital or print) distributed and unique web visits

Strategy 1.5: Offer a quality college savings (529) program by maximizing the contribution of the AFSCP Oversight Committee.

1. Oversight Committee mission and goals are presented to Trustees for approval.
2. Oversight Committee member expertise is maximized in areas of evaluation of program, knowledge of investment offerings, operations, and marketing.
3. Oversight Committee is apprised of advice from investment advisor firm at decision points and kept up-to-date on advice and new directions from investment advisor firm at regular meetings.
4. Effective Oversight Committee meetings take place five times per year to make recommendations; Trustees meet 4 times a year to make decisions.
5. Staff provides research, daily oversight, and measurement of processes against goals.
6. A productive and on-going annual provider review process results in informed decision-making by Trustees regarding program managers' contracts and investment products.

Performance Measures:

- Mission, goals, and investment policies are developed and are used to direct program administration.
- Oversight Committee and Trustee meetings are held and evaluated effective by participants.
- Outputs from the Oversight Committee meetings include recommendations to Trustees regarding:
 - decisions related to program
 - manager contracts and modification,
 - mission and goals for the AFSCP Oversight Committee,
 - operational procedures,
 - quality and affordable investment products for Arizona families, and
 - quality of financial institutions and investment products continually improve as evidenced by successful public comparison to other states' programs and meeting savings growth goals.

Strategic Issue 2: Fifty-two percent of Arizona K-12 students live at 200% of poverty or below and therefore these families are inexperienced and unaware of the necessary steps to enroll, finance, and complete a postsecondary education.

As compared to other states across the nation Arizona has:

- (1) one of the lowest college-going rates with only 50.5% of the 2013 seniors enrolling in a postsecondary education experience leaving 31,630 students with no further education options, likewise
- (2) one of the lowest college attainment rates with only 25.8% of a senior class (2008) graduating from a 2-year or 4-year postsecondary institution 6 years following high school graduation; and only
- (3) 27% of all Arizonans over the age of 25 holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

These outcomes coexist with the prediction from Anthony Carnevale's "*Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Educational Requirements through 2018*" published by Georgetown Public Policy Institute's Center on Education and the Workforce that 3 out of five jobs in Arizona, or 61%, will require some training beyond high school by 2018. No longer is high school graduation the finish line. Arizona must improve the education outcomes of our K-12 and postsecondary education systems in order to meet projected workforce and social capital needs.

College and Career Goal Arizona (C²GA) is a statewide initiative coordinated by the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education. It promotes partnerships with Title 1 high schools statewide to implement strategies designed to (1) increase the number of students making an application to a postsecondary education institution and (2) increase the number of seniors applying for and securing student financial aid, and (3) builds a sustainable college-going community to support future students' college dreams. In the past 9 months, an additional program titled the Middle School Career Exploration and Literacy Curriculum Project has been undertaken. This work was spawned by the identification of career development as a "missing, critical piece" of the college application and FAFSA programs success and is discussed under Strategy 2.5.

College and Career Goal Arizona (C²GA) includes the *Arizona College Application* and *College Goal FAFSA Campaigns*, along with FAFSA Finish Line Reports. The *College and Career Goal Arizona Campaign* promotes equity by providing a supported, cohort approach where high school staff and peer support together, take on the role played in middle class families by an experienced, college knowledgeable adult. The role of this family member includes informing, motivating, and even prodding students toward submitting, on time, a college application. In order to participate in the *Arizona College Application Campaign (CAC)*, high school principals and counselors sign a pledge to dedicate time and space, generally over 1-3 days, when every student is provided computer time to complete at least one application for postsecondary education. High schools also agree to a goal of 100% participation

More than 740,000 applications were filed in 50 states following this format last fall through the American College Application Campaign organized by the American Council on Education with financial support from Lumina. Arizona mounted a very successful fourth year campaign last November with 54 high schools representing 16,271 seniors who participated in the 2016 CAC events.

College Goal FAF\$A also provides cohort support for seniors to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All high schools participating in the College Application Campaign were invited to join the College Goal FAF\$A Campaign in 2016. Twenty-eight high schools chose to put on 52 workshops and 19 chose to receive FAFSA Finish Line Reports. The College Goal FAF\$A effort of the Arizona Commission has relied heavily over the past 20 years on the strength of an 18-member Advisory Committee and manpower from the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. These partnerships continue; however, funding from USA Funds is no longer available requiring the funding to be supplied from other sources. An additional challenge present for *College Goal FAF\$A* is the application requirement of a parent signature on the youth's FAFSA application. FAFSA completion must be a family affair.

The expectation from implementation of *College and Career Goal Arizona* in Title I high schools statewide is that increasing the number of Arizona seniors who complete a college application and successfully file the FAFSA will result in an increased college-going rate in participating high schools. Moreover, the environment in these high schools and their communities will support postsecondary education options for all graduates into the future.

Goal 2: **Provide support from knowledgeable professionals and accurate and timely information to help students and families take the steps to enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education.**

Strategy 2.1: **Establish *College and Career Goal Arizona* to develop and support a college-going culture within Arizona high schools and communities where every high school senior is encouraged and expected to apply and seek financial assistance to support a postsecondary education experience.**

1. Promote the C²GA senior year initiative statewide.
2. Establish and develop relationships with key decision-makers and pertinent staff at Arizona postsecondary education institutions and high schools.
3. Encourage Community “buy-in” via three groups 1) ACPE Commissioners, 2) the 48 member College & Career Goal Arizona Advisory Committee
4. Groups will assist in establishing partnerships and collaborations, identifying and securing funding, and recruiting volunteers.
5. Develop a Fundraising/ Partnership Plan inclusive of a case statement, goals, strategies, outcomes, and indicators for success.
6. Execute the College and Career Goal Arizona Fundraising/Partnership plan.
7. Adjust activities and outcomes to meet the budget.

Performance Measures:

- Key leadership supports the statewide initiative.
- Funding, collaborations, partnerships provide desired assistance in specific areas of need for FY 2018, FY 2019, and FY 2020.
- Increase the number and proportion of Arizona high school graduates going on to college over a four-year period of time.
- Increase the number and proportion of college-going high schools and communities in Arizona. Evidence demonstrates movement toward expectations that ALL students can benefit from and progress toward a postsecondary education experience.

Strategy 2.2: Coordinate the statewide *College Application Campaign*.

1. Secure external funding sources to implement program elements.
2. Develop marketing and public relations materials.
3. Identify and develop relevant web-based content rich materials for AzCAC website to support high schools, volunteers, and postsecondary institution personnel.
4. Recruit high schools with focus on Title 1.
5. Connect with non-profit volunteer organizations and college access organizations to share resources and collaborate.
6. Develop partnerships and collaborations with postsecondary institutions from all three sectors to ensure adequate support is provided for each of the participating high schools and staff.
7. Evaluate all aspects of the AzCAC program and act upon data collected.

Performance Measures:

- Program is adequately funded to support data analysis, high school giveaways, promotional materials, and evaluation.
- Increased number of high schools and seniors participating while retaining the focus on Title 1.
- Volunteer groups provide manpower for events at high schools.
- Postsecondary institutions' admissions professionals (all 3 sectors) attend high school events and provide expert advice for program success.
- Media and newspaper coverage promotes AzCAC and touts the outcomes.
- Data on program success is gathered from all stakeholders and analyzed for program improvements to be implemented.
- Promote program success at all levels.
- Successful school personnel will be invited to participate as a College Goal FAFSA high school.
- Increase the number and proportion of Arizona high school seniors who apply to a postsecondary education institution in the fall of their senior year.

Strategy 2.3: Coordinate the statewide *College Goal FAF\$A* events.

1. Secure external funding sources to implement program elements.
2. Promote College Goal FAF\$A events.
3. Develop relevant, web-based, content rich materials in order to support high school personnel, student, family, and postsecondary institution needs.
4. Coordinate and execute the on-going statewide College Goal FAF\$A community events along with high school-based events to assist college-bound seniors, their families, and returning adults in filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
5. Mentor site coordinators via email, phone calls, and visits as needed.
6. Recruit more than 200 financial aid professionals from all sectors of postsecondary education to staff College Goal FAF\$A events.
7. Evaluate site coordinator, funder, and family/student surveys, analyze data, and make improvements.

Performance Measures:

- Programs adequately funded to support high school giveaways, promotional materials, and program evaluation.
- College Goal FAF\$A events are held and well attended.
- Financial aid professionals and AASFAA members provide expert advice for program support both at postsecondary sites and at high school events.
- College and Career Student Progress reports indicate target audience is served and benefits are realized.
- Number of FAFSA's completed at participating high schools.
- Number of publications distributed and website visits.

Strategy 2.4: Provide student level FAFSA Completion data in the form of FAFSA Finish Line reports to participating secondary schools, Local Education Agencies, and designated entities for the purpose of increasing student FAFSA completion.

1. Commission secures written agreements with high schools, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and designated agencies, following the U.S. Department of Education requirements.
2. Commission secures state appropriation for technology, web portal, upkeep and maintenance, and 1 FTE to work with high schools to access, utilize, and analyze FAFSA Finish Line reports.
3. Professional development and web-based support materials are provided for counselors and advisors to understand data and how they can assist seniors.
4. A secure portal is established and maintained by the Commission so that high schools, LEAs, and designated entities can upload requests for informational reports every week with the goal of providing targeted assistance to students allowing them to complete their FAFSA.

Performance Measures:

- Number of contracted schools, LEAs, and designated entities receive both a manual and instruction about the use of the portal and reports.
- High schools act on information and specific knowledge to assist students to complete their FAFSA.
- High school personnel statewide become aware of the value of the FAFSA Completion reports and identify strategies to assist students in completion of individual FAFSA's.
- High schools and designated entities statewide see a significant increase in students FAFSA completions; thereby students obtain more funds for college attendance.

Strategy 2.5: Develop and promote a Middle School Career Exploration and Literacy Curriculum designed to result in every middle school student entering high school with an Early Education and Career Action Plan (Early or Pre-ECAP) based on that student's career choices.

1. Promote the Middle School Career Exploration and Literacy Curriculum developed by Hang Nguyen, Experience Matters Fellow.
2. Seek opportunities for piloting the curriculum in the FY 2017-2018 school year.
3. Use every opportunity to make the Curriculum widely known.
4. Work with Arizona State Board of Education and its Executive Director to gain acceptance of this Curriculum as an accelerator for the A-F Accountability Plan for K-8.
5. Find a permanent home for the Curriculum that will sustain and maintain critical currency.

Performance Measures:

- Funds are received from the Governor's Office to complete this mission.
- Curriculum is piloted adequately and is considered highly valuable by users
- Curriculum is deemed valuable as an indicator by the Arizona State Board of Education
- Home is found where the Curriculum will be sustained and revised to current needs no less than every two years in order to maintain a quality product.

Strategy 2.6: Provide current and relevant web and print-based information on college-going and financial assistance for families and students.

1. Secure external funding sources.
2. Develop content/program elements.

3. Identify outreach/distribution methods using partnerships and collaborations.
4. Implement, maintain, and evaluate the publications and websites including the *Arizona College and Career Guide* (print and online) and ACPE websites including College Goal Arizona, ACPE website, azgrants.gov, and AZ529.gov.

Performance Measures:

- Funds are adequate to support each project.
- Number of visits per website, numbers of publication requests
- Constituency feedback regarding value of communication and information.
- Staffing is adequate to plan, maintain, and evaluate a quality product.

Strategic Issue 3: Private and public postsecondary education sectors can enhance student success and leverage resources by working together.

The postsecondary education system in Arizona comprises 3 public universities, 10 community college districts, and more than 250 private universities, colleges, technical, and vocational schools. The membership of the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education has representation from these three sectors and additionally two K-12 superintendents and one individual from commerce and industry, all at the senior management level.

The composition of the Commission provides a unique opportunity for discussion, identification of problems and opportunities, and consideration of solutions from many perspectives. Commissioners benefit from the diverse perspectives among the group and gain a depth of knowledge about all sectors of postsecondary education. Through its work described previously in this report in the areas of equity in postsecondary opportunity and efforts to assist in closing the gap in postsecondary education attainment for low-income and minority students. The Commission, through its work in these areas, seeks to strengthen relationships among all sectors of higher education, as well as encourage cooperation between levels of education.

Goal 3: **Provide a forum where all sectors of postsecondary education dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest.**

Strategy 3.1: **Use the ACPE meetings, statewide programs, and conferences both to problem solve and identify opportunities that cross sectors of postsecondary education**

1. Hold effective meetings at least four times per year; conference every other year.
2. Use expertise of Commissioners and constituents to identify areas of opportunity and problems.

3. Use a sub-committee or collaborative task force structures to achieve the identified goals.
4. Promote work of these groups to capitalize on opportunities and solve problems.
5. Executive Director and staff participate in collaborative efforts whenever possible and contribute to the joint effort for improvement.
5. Evaluate outcomes of meetings, conferences, and revise plan annually.

Performance Measures:

- Commissioners rate meetings as effective in achieving goals
- Areas of opportunity and problems are identified through conversation and interaction.
- Collaborative work groups are established with Commissioner participation and leadership to achieve solutions or engage opportunities.
- Plans are revised and adapted to meet changing needs

Strategy 3.2: Encourage, lead, and participate in collaboration/partnerships to promote college access and success.

1. Seek avenues to encourage collaboration/partnerships that contribute to the ACPE mission, such as College and Career Goal Arizona Advisory Committee and the Arizona Family College Savings Program Oversight Committee, and lead these groups in a manner that maximizes community input and buy-in.
2. Participate and contribute to collaborative initiatives such as the Arizona College Access Network, the Arizona Career Leadership Network, Expect More Arizona, and Achieve60AZ.
3. Review the effectiveness of existing initiative investments.
4. Share resources to assist in sustaining or initiating appropriate efforts.
5. Complete an annual review of these efforts and re-allocate personnel and resources as necessary.

Performance Measures:

- Number of collaboration/partnership investments.
- Assessment of contributions received and new contributors gained.
- Reallocation of resources based on evaluation.

Strategy 3.3: Initiate research through the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center that promotes equity and supports the closing of the achievement gap in order to accomplish the mission of ACPE.

1. Develop and support policy analysis center(s).
2. Use research to identify necessary initiatives and goals.
3. Identify research and infrastructure partners.
4. Disseminate and use research to promote policy change.

Performance Measures:

- Maintain every bi-annual publication of the Arizona Minority Student Progress report to serve as a benchmark for progress and to analyze Arizona's success in closing the achievement gap over time.
- Take on issue or policy studies in between regular 2-year schedule.
- Number of studies produced that forward opportunity and best practices.
- Sustain AMEPAC through leadership, infrastructure, and fundraising support.
- Research and its findings are promoted among the community.
- Identify impact of the studies.